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**FASHION, CINEMA, AND GERMAN-AMERICAN
PROPAGANDA IN 1930S BUCHAREST****

Abstract: *This paper explores how Bucharest's cinema-going public perceived the Nazi influence on Hollywood in the 1930s. The aim is to identify how Nazi propaganda was disseminated and consumed in interwar Bucharest and its similarities to the idea of glamour, relevant both to fashion and cinema. Considering the links between Goebbels' propaganda machine and certain entities or individuals in Hollywood, US cinematography becomes a more complex medium of dissemination beyond a mere promoter of modernity's technological and consumerist ideas. Romania's situation in the 1930s, especially the increasing leaning towards the extreme right then inform movie star image, particularly through a gendered lens, as perfect tools for propagandists. The interwar cinema-centered Romanian discourse involves a triple filtration, through Hollywood, Berlin, and Bucharest, as a complex depiction of the Romanian public's ideals and views. To illustrate these points, I will analyze relevant written and visual texts from the interwar era, including fiction, memoirs, essays, nationally and locally spread cinema-centered and general periodicals, postcards, or photographs. The interdisciplinary research will include cultural studies (fashion, media, cinema, gender), history, and discourse analysis. This innovative perspective on fashion and cinema in an interwar Romanian context adds to the existing knowledge by opening new research topics and subjects in the fields of fashion studies and Romanian studies.*

Keywords: *interwar era, gender, Hollywood, Nazi Germany, United States, Romania*

This paper represents the conceptual and theoretical framework for my future research on the relationship between gender, identity, and ideology. The research builds upon Sarah Berry's assertion in her seminal book on Hollywood glamour's connection to fashion, society, and identity, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood*, that the evolution of interwar depictions of femininity was primarily

influenced by the so-called ‘popular fashion’ and Hollywood movies¹. This solidifies the importance of both fashion and film in directing gendered discourse. This paper focuses on a femininity model I propose in a Romanian context as ‘new woman,’ as opposed to the boyish, rebellious ‘modern girl’ of the 1920s, also with overt connections to the ‘new woman’s Communist reiteration. I also distinguish the usage of the words ‘modern’ in terms of the latest styles, ‘modernity’ as the cultural and technological development spearheaded by Western culture and with roots as far back as the Renaissance² and standardized in the interwar era³, and ‘modernism’ for the early-twentieth-century literary and artistic current. Despite the generalized assumption that the 1930s curtailed women’s self-assertion and emancipation, Berry emphasized that ‘popular fashion’ became their strongest tool in their negotiation of modernity and a so-called “post-traditional identity,” which she defined as “the shift from hereditary caste systems to capitalist social divisions.” Basing identity markers on consumption patterns, as Berry explained, also allowed for a gradual democratizing shift of gendered classifications traditionally assumed as professional or social for men and “symbolic” (fashion, beauty) for women⁴. Yet this democratization does not automatically imply significant emancipation victories for women. Instead, it is a reflection of women’s “ongoing struggle for visible autonomy in the social sphere”⁵. This can also be extended to the female

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¹ Sarah Berry, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xii.

² Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 11-12.

³ Ibid, 18.

⁴ Ibid, xiii.

⁵ Ibid, xiv.

movie star, on the silver screen and as a public personality. This idea of “ongoing struggle” can also be applied to popular cinema as well, as intuited by Germanist Sabine Hake, especially in connection to the pre-Unification treatment of Third Reich cinema as “the ultimate Other of world cinema” in film history research⁶. Instead, she proposed an approach acknowledging its “inherent contradictions” drawing from Weimar Republic practices blended with National Socialist policy implementation⁷. By 1930, Garbo had already established herself as the “Swedish Sphinx” after her Hollywood debut in the mid-1920s⁸. Even Dietrich, described by cultural historian Thomas Doherty as “the greatest of all Weimar imports”⁹ and one of Garbo’s glamour rivals since the 1930s praised Garbo’s mysterious allure, which she could not emulate¹⁰.

The connection between glamour and cinema is also etymological. The origin of the term’s current usage is habitually cited as classical Hollywood, particularly referring to the 1930s¹¹. Since then, ‘glamour’ has become an integral component of the so-called “capitalist modernity”¹². Overall, cinema and to some extent fashion in the 1930s created according to Berry a “mythology of ‘bluff,’ a celebration of symbolic over ‘real’ status”¹³. Financially and socially constrained fashionable Bucharesters were similarly encouraged to seem as glamorous and affluent at the lowest possible cost, a different sort of “bluff” intended to appease the distraught Romanian men¹⁴ and impress foreign visitors as so-called “ambassadors of Romanian beauty”¹⁵. At the

⁶ Sabine Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), viii.

⁷ Ibid, x.

⁸ Patty Fox, *Star Style: Hollywood Legends as Fashion Icons* (Santa Monica CA: Angel City Press, 1995), 43.

⁹ Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939*, Film and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 204-205.

¹⁰ Fox, *Star Style*, 48.

¹¹ Stephen Gundle and Clino T. Castelli, *The Glamour System* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 3.

¹² Ibid, 7.

¹³ Berry, *Screen Style*, xvii.

¹⁴ R. Vior, *Fii frumoasă doamnă* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1938), 11.

¹⁵ See “Alegerea ‘Miss României.’ Grandioasa manifestatie pentru ‘Miss Arad,’” *Românul– Organ al Partidului Național Țărănesc Român Arad*, March

core, then, this act of ‘bluffing’ brightness in a time of darkness could be interpreted psychologically rather than sociologically, as a form of coping, essential to the emotional – and physiological – survival of all Romanians. This can also be connected to the growing discourse on ‘new women’ as carers and mothers, whose main role, especially according to right-wing rhetoric, was to nurture, guide, and support the blossoming generation of ‘new men.’

While several female movie stars, including Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, overtly displayed traits of “transgressive femininity” by donning male attires¹⁶ in “a range of social settings”¹⁷, fashionable Bucharesters were not as keen to go that far with their Hollywood imitation in ‘Little Paris’ spaces. In the case of Romania’s capital, ‘Little Paris’ spaces denote public urban locations in the Bucharest cityspace (the material and symbolic cityspace and its surroundings) that seemed to be equivalent to the West and were often cited as ideal touristic spots for regional and international visitors. Urban centers, in this context Paris, Los Angeles, Berlin, and perhaps Bucharest, become fashion cities if their nature surpasses mere manufacture and commerce criteria as spaces where decisions are made, thus effectively becoming “global centres of power”¹⁸. Viewed from the positive side of modernity, this paper’s timeframe covers an era of unprecedented academic, technological, and scientific progress, coupled with the early years of classical Hollywood. On a darker note, the timeframe coincides with the immediate aftermath of the Great Depression, subsequent worldwide social and political upheaval, and the rise of dictatorships unabashedly embracing extreme right-wing rhetoric and measures leading the world into World War 2. The propaganda theme also applies the idea outlined by Doherty in terms of cinema censorship. While cuts vary across cultures, nations, or political systems, the practice itself has been universal¹⁹. In the context

24, 1929, edition 13, 2, for an example of the usage of this phrase in the context of *Miss Romania* pageants.

¹⁶ Berry, *Screen Style*, 143.

¹⁷ Ibid, 145.

¹⁸ Frédéric Godart, “The Power Structure of the Fashion Industry: Fashion Capitals, Globalization and Creativity,” *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 1, no. 1 (April 1, 2014): 40, https://doi.org/10.1386/inf.1.1.39_1.

¹⁹ Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*, 24-25.

of the notion of ‘transorientalism’ described by artist and author Adam Geczy as “the queering of cultural identity” in constant flow²⁰, a balanced analysis of historical and current cultural, artistic, and identity negotiations must acknowledge and thoroughly understand local, regional and national variations and sensibilities²¹. Furthermore, Hake contended that as “economic competition” represented the boundary between national cinema industries, Hollywood would seldom be categorized in such terms. By expanding the definitions beyond identity or geographical boundaries, she argued the innerworkings of the relationship between extreme right-wing cinema cultures, like Germany, with Europe and Hollywood were based upon a “selective incorporation of other filmic styles and traditions to more aggressive nationalist agenda”²².

This paper thus follows identity negotiations on a spectrum of connotations between ‘glamour’ and ‘propaganda.’ I propose that these two terms share similarities as they both involve the idea of swaying an individual or group through subtle or underhanded means. Glamour benefits propaganda by adding glimmer to a stern political message, while propaganda can benefit glamour by associating a deeper meaning to physical and visual exuberance. This inference then relativizes the positive-negative dichotomy associated with modernity, focusing here on cinema and fashion. But before detailing Bucharest’s situation and potential contribution to this intercontinental cultural and ideological negotiation, it is essential to provide an overview of the Berlin-Hollywood relationship in terms of cinema, femininity, and identity dialogues.

The Hollywood Dream Machine

Just like fashion, cinema bridged modernity’s artistic and industrial aspects. For late film historian Miriam Hansen, artistic expression belongs to “a larger history and economy of sensory

²⁰ Adam Geczy, *Transorientalism in Art, Fashion, and Film: Inventions of Identity* (London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi and Sydney: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 36.

²¹ Ibid, 42.

²² Hake, *Popular Cinema*, 21.

perception” decisive in depicting and tracing modernity. She asserted that the modernist aesthetics encompassing “cultural practices that both articulated and mediated the experience of modernity” pertain to a so-called “vernacular” modernity. As Hansen explained, this avoids the “ideologically overdetermined” term ‘popular,’ blending connotations of everyday life with those of “discourse, idiom, and dialect, with circulation, promiscuity, and translatability”²³. Such a perspective allows for a more complex interpretation of the dynamics of and between the international cinema industry, notable urban spaces, women’s fashion, and the international cultural, political, or economic developments throughout the 1930s. Another common characteristic of fashion and film is the ability to simultaneously conjure illusion and reality²⁴, suggesting a similar quality of magic-like influence like glamour. As Berry contended, during twentieth-century modernity, fashion’s symbolic aspects began to permeate the marketplace. This redefined capitalist consumption towards connotations of a “symbolic economy” intent on replacing Max Weber’s widely-used notion of ‘protestant work ethic’²⁵. And as with any popular form of mass consumption, cinema is infused with politics even in contexts and productions that may seem simple or frivolous at an initial glance²⁶. By the mid-interwar era, cinema was already cementing its social and artistic influence and, interestingly, the first and most prominent academic voices analyzing cinema in terms of its technical, economic, and social effects, were German. As a sociologist, author, journalist, and film critic Siegfried Kracauer believed film mirrored and benefitted from the support of its dominant society and benefitted from its support²⁷. According to Kracauer, interwar cinematographic storytelling began exploring symbolic realms, revealing

²³ Miriam Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism,” *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. 2 (1999): 59, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.1999.0018>.

²⁴ Michelle Tolini Finamore, *Hollywood Before Glamour* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230389496>, 168.

²⁵ Berry, *Screen Style*, xiii.

²⁶ Richard Rushton, *The Politics of Hollywood Cinema: Popular Film and Contemporary Political Theory* (Basingstoke and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2-3

²⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (1963; repr., Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 291.

the underlying mechanisms and emotions of individuals and communities²⁸. Another notable example would be from the realms of philosophy, with Walter Benjamin's contention that filmmaking involved the usage of equipment around the set, unrelated to the storyline and not transmitted onscreen²⁹, which implies a thorough editorial process akin to a technological "Blue Flower," a doubly-distorted expression³⁰. Coupled with the unachievable quality inherent to the 'Hollywood dream' and the illusory aspects of *haute couture*, it could be argued that the art forms developed during modernity played upon a hybrid realm between imagination and reality.

In this sense, as systems pertaining both to material and symbolic culture, cinema and fashion become harder to differentiate as their conception, production, dissemination, consumption, and interpretation practices oftentimes coincide. This was already visible in Bucharest as fashionable women walking Bucharest's high streets in the 1930s were compared to Hollywood actresses³¹. This adds to what Berry described as the "synergy" between the fashion, beauty, and cinema industries, especially visible in the growing hybrid marketing campaigns like associating products with movie stars as valid endorsements³². Overall, promoting fashion through Hollywood movies reflected a propensity for "dissemination, stylization, and revival" that would ultimately function as trendsetting, alongside a display of local styles increasingly dissociated from both Paris and New York³³. Another common thread in 1930s fashion, cinema, and advice literature geared towards women was a so-called "self-invention" with consumerist and social performance undertones³⁴. From fashion and cosmetic ads and

²⁸ Ibid, 292.

²⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, 1935-1938*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Howard Eiland, vol. 3, (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 117.

³⁰ Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology,'" *New German Critique*, no. 40 (1987): 204.

³¹ Graziella Doicescu, *Captivantul Bucureşti interbelic: Tablete*, (Bucharest: Vremea, 2008), 123.

³² Berry, *Screen Style*, xiv.

³³ Ibid, xx.

³⁴ Ibid, xxi.

film divas overpowering men using an irresistible concoction of glamour, assertion, and intelligence, to beauty manuals³⁵, eugenic texts³⁶, and fervent extreme-right-wing rhetoric³⁷, the discourse dedicated to women constantly emphasized the idea of body and personality as empty canvasses at the women's disposal, but with the need of gentle but strict guidance from – mostly male – specialists. Apart from implications of social engineering using fashionable characters, models, and ideas, mid-interwar era film studios recognized the considerable profit potentials of promoting particular “looks” and “types” (as seen in the widespread usage of the ‘Garbo type’)³⁸. This idea can also be connected to the classification of pageant candidates according to context-specific sets of “idealized versions of femininity”³⁹. While movies suggest certain directions, beauty contests directly classify a fixed number of candidates by a jury over chosen standards within a supposedly “rational and operational” framework utilizing competition for qualitative differentiation⁴⁰. This could also be seen in interwar Romania's propensity for beauty contests, with the most vivid example as the two parallel *Miss Romania* pageants both affiliated with different international *Miss Universe* organizations⁴¹. As Elizabeth Wilson

³⁵ See Vior, *Fii frumoasă doamnă*.

³⁶ See Aurel Voinea, *Îngrijirea tenului* (Bucharest: Cugetarea - Georgescu Delafras, 1938).

³⁷ See Radu Gyr, *Femeia în eroismul spiritual, moral și național*, 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Cetățuia Legionară, 1937).

³⁸ Finamore, *Hollywood Before Glamour*, 169.

³⁹ Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk, and Beverly Stoeltje, “Introduction. Beauty Queens on the Global Stage,” in *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage. Gender, Contests, Power.*, ed. Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk, and Beverly Stoeltje (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 2.

⁴⁰ Beverly Stoeltje, “The Snake Charmer Queen: Ritual, Competition and Signification in American Festival,” in *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage. Gender, Contests, Power.*, ed. Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk, and Beverly Stoeltje (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 18.

⁴¹ See Sonia D. Andraș, “Beauty and Nation: Miss Romania as International Ambassador,” in *Studies on Literature, Discourse and Multicultural Dialogue*, ed. Iulian Boldea, vol. 1 (Târgu-Mureș: Arhipelag XXI Press, 2013), 424–31 and Andraș, “The Ideal Woman: Beauty Contests in Interwar Romania” (3rd Global Conference, Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary.Net, 2013), <https://web.archive.org/web/20151223054530/http://www.inter->

contended in her seminal 1985 fashion studies book *Adorned in Dreams*, if identity is a “special kind of problem in ‘modernity,’” fashion marks “the tension between the crowd and the individual at every stage in the development of the nineteenth and twentieth-century metropolis”⁴². Concerning the two stars mentioned as main Hollywood star examples in this paper, Garbo and Dietrich, were both praised for their ability to create and maintain a specific career direction, with Garbo akin to a military strategist negotiating her constructed Greta Garbo persona and keeping the real Greta Gustafsson as private as possible⁴³, and Dietrich as the brain behind her rebellious image, donning trousers⁴⁴. Regarding fashion, both were crucial as trendsetters. Belonging to a minority of silent film actors who successfully transitioned to sound, the evolving ‘Garbo type’ was evoked, imitated, and desired for at least three decades⁴⁵. For Patty Fox, Dietrich’s “legs and her propensity for pants” represented a turning point in women’s fashion⁴⁶. But Garbo and Dietrich were the absolute exceptions as the ‘Hollywood dream’ pushed towards women worldwide contained more unrealistic hopes than viable action plans. Celebrity culture, however, had been a staple of mass culture for centuries⁴⁷. And elegant Romanians, especially Bucharesters, like all women living in modern and modernizing societies, were keen to actively take part in celebrity culture, even if through imitation.

Romania’s propensity for Hollywood can be explained through Ronald Asmus and Alexandr Vondra’s assertion that America’s image in the Central and East European space has been largely positive, despite

disciplinary.net/critical-issues/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/SDAndras_wpaper-beau3.pdf., for an outline of the *Miss Romania* pageants in terms of gender and national identity.

⁴² Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, 2nd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 11-12.

⁴³ David Bret, *Greta Garbo* (London: Robson Press, 2012), 8.

⁴⁴ Fox, *Star Style*, 32.

⁴⁵ See Sonia D. Andraş, “„Morbil Garbitei.” Influența modelelor hollywoodiene în moda Bucureștiului interbelic,” in *Școală, biserică, stat și națiune în istoria României*, ed. Liviu Boar, Ioan Bolovan, and Laura Stanciu (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2021), 355–71.

⁴⁶ Fox, *Star Style*, 32.

⁴⁷ Pamela Church Gibson, *Fashion and Celebrity Culture* (London and New York: Berg, 2012), 42.

regional preference fluctuations between German and Russian influence spheres⁴⁸. While emulating celebrities established “new and different ideals of dress and self-presentation” of physique and dress away from *haute couture*⁴⁹, our current understanding of the practice is indebted chiefly to the cinema industry since the interwar era⁵⁰. According to Cheryl Buckley and Hazel Clark, “commonality, mass-experience, and accelerated consumption” inform “specific historical junctures,” with Hollywood as the main drive for the 1930s⁵¹. Even more, for Hake, the transition from silent to sound in 1930s film productions effectively ended the “speculation about silent film’s inherently democratic tendencies” where the ethnic, national, and cultural differences could be experienced beyond easily translatable written or visual texts⁵². As *Singin’ in the Rain* a couple of decades later and more recently *Downton Abbey: A New Era* expressively recounted, accents and specific speech or voice patterns could no longer be hidden behind a silver smokescreen and became an exasperating affair for both filmmakers, film crews, actors and studio executives. But, as will be seen later in this paper, sound movies could become a powerful weapon in the hands of propagandists with access to advanced filmmaking tools and able on-screen and off-screen staff. Fashion and beauty function similarly within a reflexive modern connection, as identified by Hansen for cinema⁵³, between the agents of modernization and the audience. This contrasts the Others while constructing a purported authentic national self by selectively assimilating structural or cultural configurations⁵⁴. From a

⁴⁸ Ronald D. Asmus and Alexandr Vondra, “The Origins of Atlanticism in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18, no. 2 (July 2005): 204-5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570500164439>.

⁴⁹ Gibson, *Fashion and Celebrity Culture*, 19.

⁵⁰ Patrice Petro, “Introduction. Stardom in the 1920s,” in *Idols of Modernity: Movie Stars of the 1920s*, ed. Patrice Petro (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 8.

⁵¹ Cheryl Buckley and Hazel Clark, “Conceptualizing Fashion in Everyday Lives,” *Design Issues* 28, no. 4 (Autumn 2012): 22.

⁵² Hake, *Popular Cinema*, 139.

⁵³ Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses,” 69.

⁵⁴ Victor Roudometof, “Nationalism, Globalization, Eastern Orthodoxy: ‘Unthinking’ the ‘Clash of Civilizations’ in Southeastern Europe,” *European*

fashion theory perspective, the regretted fashion theorist Djurdja Bartlett's contention that "fashion has always been transnational," places it against "ethnic dress, fashion's Other," where only the latter holds a valid claim of authenticity⁵⁵. As products of modernity cinema and fashion have been conceived as transnational and transcultural global phenomena both in a state of constant tense competition with local cultural, economic, or social systems. Romania thus integrates into this process culturally and materially, integral to the discussions worldwide interactions as such or through individuals and works on the spectrum of active participation to passive compliance.

On a more economic level, collaborations between Hollywood studios and Paris couture great names were possible solutions to the financial strain involved in the complete cinema production and dissemination strategy shift. One often-cited case is the collaboration between Coco Chanel and producer Samuel Goldwyn in the early 1930s with the promise of displaying *haute couture* roughly six months before they were illicitly copied⁵⁶. But as Michelle Tolini Finamore observed, Chanel's designs were not movie costumes per se, as they were not intended as props in storytelling, but as promotional tools for the Chanel aesthetic. Costumes, even period pieces, are meant to be pleasing to their contemporary public. Yet they can easily pinpoint their era in retrospective stills or promotional images. Even if a scene or entire movie would appear to the moviegoing public as a slice of daily life, its conception and production are "marked by abnormal circumstances," from the atmosphere on the set to the use of special effects⁵⁷. As such collaborations have proven to be unproductive especially on the Hollywood side, as the specialized class of movie costume designers was already in full development in the 1930s, with an emphasis on a "distinctive Hollywood glamour"⁵⁸. The theoretical connection between fashion and attracting the female public would then have to be modified

Journal of Social Theory 2, no. 2 (May 1, 1999): 235,
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13684319922224428>.

⁵⁵ Djurdja Bartlett, "Can Fashion Be Defended?" in *Fashion and Politics*, ed. Djurdja Bartlett (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), 33.

⁵⁶ Finamore, *Hollywood Before Glamour*, 174-175.

⁵⁷ Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, 284.

⁵⁸ Finamore, *Hollywood Before Glamour*, 178.

to include the relationship between women as spectators and costumed movie divas as “embodied screen design-in-motion”⁵⁹. Scholars as early as Siegfried Kracauer intuited the powerful influence of film as modern art on desire and how it is produced⁶⁰. According to Hake, Kracauer’s “elaborations on diversion” could serve as a basis to replace the history of film with that of cinema, as it “resuscitates our awareness of persistent social needs”⁶¹. However, Berry believed cinema’s driving force was more the carnivalesque used for the “demystification of specific codes of behavior, dress, and social entitlement,” rather than escapism and its inherent implications of camouflage⁶². In the same way, the sight of fashionable *flâneuses* on Calea Victoriei in the afternoon was not only a vividly colorful sheet covering the Romanian people’s distress but a means of expurgating their anxiety and frustrations by pretending they were in a different world. At the dawn of the 1930s, *Ilustrațiunea Română* published an article by Ion Tik about Bucharest’s nightlife, equating the crowded, noisy, and brightly-lit Elisabeta Boulevard, another glamorous and fashionable artery, to “the Romanian Hollywood,” a common nickname given to the Avenue in the “*sherbetuous* and *cinophilic* [sic] language of infatuated girls.” In the article, Tik and a friend strolled along the Boulevard by the couples and crowds going in and out of the cinemas whose lights mesmerize those used to the quiet and dark nights in Bucharest’s slums, the *mahalale*. Tik’s friend expressed his disdain at the influence cinema had on the youth, to which Tik countered that as all young women dreamed of becoming Hollywood stars, in the face of reality, they would be comforted by comparisons with a Dietrich or a Garbo⁶³. But the cinema-going public included Bucharest’s entire population and visitors, from university students to high government officials as described by writer

⁵⁹ Jane M. Gaines, “On Wearing the Film: Madam Satan (1930),” in *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations, and Analysis*, ed. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 161.

⁶⁰ Sabine Hake, “Girls and Crisis - The Other Side of Diversion,” *New German Critique*, Weimar Film Theory, no. 40 (Winter 1987): 147, <https://doi.org/10.2307/488136>.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁶² Berry, *Screen Style*, xxi.

⁶³ Ion Tik, “Bucureștiul petrece,” *Ilustrațiunea Română*, May 14, 1931, 6.

and journalist Mircea Damian⁶⁴. Tik also observed “respectable” adults or parents with children in front of various cinemas. In one scene, Tik described a meeting between two families in full passionate negotiations about the movie they should see, when an elder gentleman in the group proposed they go to a tavern instead to eat “*mititei*”⁶⁵ and some nice wine” because he was “sick of those Germans who sing at the gramophone,” to the vehement protests of an “overdressed and red like a turkey” lady, likely his wife. The author did not specify whether the man’s usage of the Romanian word *nemți* (Germans) referred to German-speaking individuals or an established nickname for Western-dressed youths in Bucharest’s more traditional enclaves, which would likely extend the nickname to English-speaking actors. As Tik explained, this would derail attending a movie premiere “here, in the center of Hollywood” for two suburban families⁶⁶. Tik’s friend reacted to the scene stating that these movie-goers celebrated like he did “in his little town,” with church in the morning and cinema in the evening, followed by conversations over a glass of beer or wine, right before an early bedtime. Tik recounted how proud his friend was of these “monotonous and remarkable bourgeois celebrations,” even claiming that he did not know the meaning of a sleepless night for the past decade⁶⁷.

All aspects of the Hollywood cinema industry were thought out to solicit the strongest emotional response possible. This included the lavish movie premieres, conceived as concomitantly “enticing and profoundly frustrating” events for the movie-going crowds⁶⁸. While Bucharest could not host such extravagant events, Bucharest cinema enthusiasts could read about them in cinema-themed and general magazine generously-illustrated reports. And in Bucharest, like everywhere else in the modern and modernizing world of the 1930s, women represented the target audience for cinema and fashion consumption. As movie producers have observed since the inception of their industry, the main point of attraction for the female audience was

⁶⁴ See Mircea Damian, *București* (Bucharest: The “Carol II” Foundation for Literature and Art, 1935).

⁶⁵ Romanian traditional sausages.

⁶⁶ Tik, “Bucureștiul petrece,” 6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁶⁸ Karnes, “The Glamorous Crowd,” 562.

fashion, especially in the sense of displaying the latest, at the time Parisian models⁶⁹. As Berry pointed out, in the second half of the interwar era advertising was centered around a female public based upon the assumption that most consumption was achieved by women, even if the products or services were destined for men. This did not only apply to buying and selling products. Movie promoters applied the same tactic informed by the belief that even if they did not purchase the ticket itself, they were the main force behind choosing which film to see⁷⁰. Female characters also received renewed attention with a preponderance of themes around empowered women's stories from success through seduction to androgynous and exotic characters⁷¹. For Carol Dyhouse, the combination of the idea that women's allure explicitly suggested their "economic potential" and a powerful post-Great Depression need for escapism created "the golden age of glamour," whose performance was delivered through Hollywood. Echoing Berry's depiction of female empowerment on the silver screen, Dyhouse noted that the "glamorous woman on the make" was a new type of central character of the "booming American film industry," garnished to look brilliant and enticing in black and white, in "thick, lustrous furs, slinky dresses over curvaceous but slim figures, exotic flowers, and stark red lips," adding to a "witty, risqué, devil-may-care confidence." Dyhouse concluded that all these helped codify the idea of 'glamour' as the word's use exploded across literary and media fields⁷². Yet, as Berry observed Hollywood stardom, however, still centered around a so-called "Garboesque European glamour" informed by the belief that Garbo's style and behavior displayed genuine "foreign, aristocratic femininity"⁷³ concomitantly "Orientalized" as a purported "pale exoticism"⁷⁴.

But not all non-American movie stars wished to become the next Garbo. Hollywood reporter James Gray for *Realitatea Ilustrată* titled a 1932 conversation with the rising Romanian-American Hollywood star

⁶⁹ Finamore, *Hollywood Before Glamour*, 175.

⁷⁰ Berry, *Screen Style*, xiv.

⁷¹ Ibid, xvi.

⁷² Carol Dyhouse, *Glamour. Women, History, Feminism*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Zed Books, 2011), 35-36.

⁷³ Berry, *Screen Style*, 40.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 111.

Tala Birell as “I Do Not Want to Look like Greta Garbo.” As he explained, since her first success in the spring of the same year, Birell had been incessantly compared to Garbo. Gray justified the comparisons by mentioning a series of common traits: both were svelte, introverted, and independent, wore sportswear, and engaged in “long marches.” As Gray remarked, Birell was likely the only woman in the world who did not seek to copy “the most interesting vamp type” who launched, according to the author, a new fashion “in the aspects of the feminine world across the globe, from the largest civilization centers to the most obscure little corners, of the provinces,” in short, he explained, whenever cinema managed to “spread its tentacles”⁷⁵. In the context of this paper, interwar Romania dynamically negotiated its identity between the two extremes of Gray’s mapping of the “Garbite disease,” as it had been described in an article about Garbo’s Hollywood imitators in the 1 March 1932 issue of illustrated weekly *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, including images of Garbo, alongside Dietrich, Dorothy Jordan, Conchita Montenegro, Edwina Booth, and Lilian Harvey⁷⁶. But according to Gray, the first foreign actress to closely resemble Garbo’s “general traits” was Birell, even when she was working in Europe. But unlike other rising stars, Birell openly expressed her rejection of this comparison, as she disliked Garbo’s acting style and did not wish to be compared to any other artist. Birell did have the occasion to witness Garbo’s powerful presence still retaining her youthful innocence, while shooting a movie cited in the article as *Căi singuratece (Lonely Paths)*⁷⁷, likely referring to the 1925 production *Die Freudlose Gasse (Joyless Street)*, directed by Georg Wilhelm Pabst. Furthermore, Gray noted the social status difference, Birell was the daughter of Polish Baroness Sahaydakowska, granting her an “admirable chiseling,” a gracious posture and a well-modulated, profound voice, an “extreme sensitivity and ability to understand” that is rarely seen in American women. Birell’s mother lost her title when she married a Romanian commoner, “a certain mister Bârlea” she met in Vienna, where they lived until Birell

⁷⁵ James Gray, “Nu vreau să semăn cu Greta Garbo,” *Realitatea Ilustrată*, September 15, (1932): 4.

⁷⁶ “Pe urmele Gretei. După chipul și asemănarea ei,” *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, March 1, (1932):27-28.

⁷⁷ Gray, “Nu vreau să semăn cu Greta Garbo,” 4.

was seven years old. During World War I, the family fled to Berlin to a life of poverty, but great ambition for Birell who strived to establish herself as an actress. She began her rise after being discovered by Max Reinhardt, marking the moment by changing her name from Natalia Bârlea to Tala Birell. At the time the article was published, Birell lived in Hollywood with her sister Gabriella. Gray proceeded to give a detailed physical description of the Romanian-Polish actress, as a 1.77 meter “unoxygenated blonde” woman weighing 52 kilograms. She dressed simply in a sport style, was “extremely natural,” fluent in German, French, Romanian, Polish, and English, a natural musician and gardening lover, who “marched” for two hours every day regardless of the weather and her favorite authors were John Galsworthy, Oscar Wilde, and Knut Hamsun. Gray pointed out she did not form friendships easily but her small intimate circle nicknamed her Talusha. She rejected the “frivolity” with which love was treated in Hollywood, as both love and marriage were sacred and required maturity⁷⁸.

Another aspect appealing to the middle-class cinema public of the 1930s was the idea that affluence as seen on the silver screen was a matter of appearance, rather than class or breeding⁷⁹. This furthers the seemingly-democratic nature of systems growing in modernity, such as cinema and fashion, suggesting a possibility of upward social movement through a combination of outstanding intellectual and physical traits. Non-elite women could then access exclusivist spaces professionally or through associations with men and even other women, without the immediate assumption of firm social condemnation. While most interwar bourgeois Bucharesters did not even expect to follow the paths laid by Hollywood vamps, they could at least seem like they could during their regular promenade schedule or when socializing in ‘Little Paris’ spaces. As Damian put it, the most striking characteristic of Elisabeta Boulevard, adjacent to Bucharest’s social and commercial heart, Calea Victoriei⁸⁰, was the fact that it hosted the greatest number of cinemas in the capital, namely the “most elegant and the most populated” ones⁸¹. Even with an enthusiastic urban cinema-going public, interwar Romania’s fiscal

⁷⁸ Ibid, 5.

⁷⁹ Berry, *Screen Style*, xix.

⁸⁰ Damian, *București*, 15.

⁸¹ Damian, *București*, 33.

policies debilitated the development of cinema theater networks even in Bucharest, which meant that there were not enough cinemas to serve the Romanian public comfortably⁸². Yet, as Damian described 1935 Bucharest, cinemas were always crowded, just like the fashionable streets or entertainment venues⁸³. But Romania's ambivalence was not endemic to its cultural and geographic context. Hollywood was not always the progressive – and arguably left-leaning – paradise of glamour and personal liberty as it may seem on the surface, especially in its self-representation.

Joseph (Goebbels) Goes to Hollywood

The German film industry and Hollywood have been engaging in a process of cross-pollination to various degrees since the Weimar Republic⁸⁴. As Hake asserted, the first reaction to the idea of Nazi film or cinema is defining it in terms of “mass manipulation, popular entertainment, and fascist aesthetics,” leaving little room for the individuals and institutions involved in the process from conception and production to dissemination and consumption⁸⁵. Yet, as she explained, popular cinema is crucial in depicting the modernization process and how modernity has been experienced⁸⁶. This functions under the umbrella of ‘genre,’ a term that has remained an “essential critical tool” for differentiating films in terms of production, theme, and structure alongside cultural and social implications⁸⁷. As genre itself is fraught with incongruous interpretations, this term alone cannot offer a panoramic image of the cinema consumption phenomenon⁸⁸. Mark Antliff's insight on current research acknowledging the

⁸² Mihail, *Filmul românesc*, 26-28.

⁸³ Damian, *Bucureşti*, 34.

⁸⁴ Kristin Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch Goes to Hollywood: German and American Film After World War I* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 16.

⁸⁵ Hake, *Popular Cinema*, 1-2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 7.

⁸⁷ Barry Langford, *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), vii.

⁸⁸ Langford, *Film Genre*, 2.

interconnectedness between ‘fascism’ and ‘modern art’⁸⁹ can be extended to cinema even if only viewed as a pure artistic form. Cinema’s connection to modernity implying capitalist and consumerist practices furthers the potential for both direct and indirect links between Hollywood and The Third Reich. This dichotomic relationship functions between notion pairs like progressive-conservative, emancipation-repression, multiculturalism-Aryanization, or cosmopolitanism-populism. Doherty highlighted these interrelations, even if at the surface occurring between two inherently incompatible cultures, were much more direct and lucrative on a personal and professional level, and on both sides of the Atlantic filmmakers agreed they had “magic to conjure, product to peddle, and money to be made”⁹⁰.

The first stage occurred during the Weimar Republic, when, as Doherty recounted, the preponderantly-Jewish Hollywood studio executives noticed the high artistic and technical qualities of European, namely German, cinema. This led to devising a strategy to weaken German cinema, which they saw as their main rival, but at the same time profit from its highly skilled personnel. Studios hence began finding ways to import talent connected to the German or European film industry under the belief of “Why compete when you could buy out?”⁹¹. This implies both sides understood this as a profitable exchange. As Doherty described the relationship, before Hitler, “the Hollywood-Berlin express worked to the mutual advantage of both sides of the hyphen”⁹². Doherty surmised before 1933, Germany represented more of a “lucrative market to cultivate and exploit, or a business rival to co-opt and crush” which did not impose a serious moral dilemma for the Weimar Republic as with Nazi Germany⁹³. The Weimar film industry was also well-respected in Romania. In a late-1930 article, author, film theorist, translator, and political economist Dumitru Ion Suchianu dedicated *Realitatea Ilustrată*’s *Cinematographic Chronicle* section to German cinematography, focusing primarily on Dietrich’s latest movies, namely

⁸⁹Mark Antliff, “Fascism, Modernism, and Modernity,” *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 1 (March 2002): 148, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177257>.

⁹⁰Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*, 13.

⁹¹Ibid, 14.

⁹²Ibid, 17.

⁹³Ibid.

Blue Angel and the summertime movie Suchianu translated as *Frumoasa necunoscută* (*The Unknown Beauty*), likely Fred Sauer's *Nights of Love*, also starring Willi Forst and Lotte Loring that premiered in February 1930. Commenting on *The Blue Angel*, Suchianu declared himself satisfied as Dietrich proved she had "everything to become a great, great artist." On a general note, Suchianu noted that among all European cinemas, German productions come closest to displaying an "artistic construction" that had been lost with talkies and musicals. His argument relied on the assumption that Germans are "the most obedient, the most docile, and the most conscientious nation," possessing the highest degree of what Suchianu called "the student's *bossa*." In his opinion, German cinema's evolution negotiated between evocative stage acting, contemporary artistic currents, and the natural and simple technique of "American acting," portrayed by actor Emil Jannings contrasted by the higher emotional reaction of the public to Dietrich and the rest of the *Blue Angel* cast, as Suchianu claimed. The author concluded that especially the two 1930 productions with Dietrich as the lead actress proved that German cinematography had surpassed any other country in achieving an "alliance" between the American "impeccable acting" and the European "conception spirituality"⁹⁴.

The above-mentioned Tala Birell is then part of this first wave of German cinematic immigration to Hollywood, as direct Romanian participation, but starting from Berlin. But the same James Gray reported in the summer of 1932 that US authorities could deport foreign cinema actors⁹⁵. This not only did not occur but starting with 1933 the German-Hollywood pipeline would increase exponentially. Early-1933 cinema executives insisted on assumptions of Hitler's likely openness towards the United States, which Doherty attributed to "wishful thinking and purblind vision that befogged the minds of stateside filmmakers throughout the 1930s"⁹⁶. On the American side, Hollywood production began adapting to the new economic reality. Consequently, movies and promotional materials began to noticeably avoid both Jewish subjects

⁹⁴ Dumitru Ion Suchianu, "Cronica cinematografică," *Realitatea Ilustrată*, December 4, (1930):4.

⁹⁵ James Gray, "America expulzează actorii de cinema străini?" *Realitatea Ilustrată*, July 14, (1932).

⁹⁶ Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*, 18.

and anything related to Hitler⁹⁷. But as the anti-Nazi wave became stronger on the eve of World War 2, studio executives realized they had “more to resent and less to lose,” stiffening “Hollywood’s backbone” regarding both Hitler and Mussolini⁹⁸. Congruent with Nazi and Fascist ideologies of virility and combativeness, Berlin and Rome’s responses to subtle critique were, however, aggressive and “very much below the belt”⁹⁹. Furthermore, Nazi propaganda had already started associating the idea of ‘America’ with the now-defunct Weimar Republic and its negative traits summed together under the umbrella of “Americanization”¹⁰⁰.

Yet the glamorous or at least interesting aspect of the popular art produced did not necessarily suffer. Nazi propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels built his system on the understanding that even if serving politics, art should not be a so-called “didactic snooze” and attending movies even in Berlin should look like “patrons in the seats and eyes glued to the screen”¹⁰¹. According to Doherty, Goebbels was Hitler’s most recognizable minion, who compensated with “fanatical intensity what he lacked in body mass”¹⁰². As per fame, Doherty claimed Goebbels was “second only to Hitler as the face of Nazi Germany in the media-saturated 1930s”¹⁰³. In early 1933, Goebbels inaugurated the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, tasked with regulating what people experienced visually or textually in their daily lives. Doherty compared Goebbels’ conception of the importance of film in totalitarian state culture creation to Lenin’s similar view of the arts¹⁰⁴. This generated a “fundamental tension” between ‘national’ and ‘popular’ cinema productions¹⁰⁵. Propaganda in this context was unapologetically assumed as one of the Nazi State’s main attributes with Goebbels at the helm, answering only to the Fuhrer himself¹⁰⁶. Despite fluctuations in

⁹⁷ Ibid, 45.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 209-210.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 211.

¹⁰⁰ Hake, *Popular Cinema*, 130.

¹⁰¹ Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*, 20.

¹⁰² Ibid., 18.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 19-20.

¹⁰⁵ Hake, *Popular Cinema*, 15.

¹⁰⁶ Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*, 20.

determining the “proper” amount of politics into art, Nazi propaganda remained “clearheaded and single-minded” in one direction, namely antisemitism¹⁰⁷, even leading to the usage of ‘Jewish’ as a valid negative judgment in film criticism¹⁰⁸. Hake attributed this to the Nazi state’s attempt to strengthen the German cinema industry through a “false reconciliation” between Hollywood’s unsurmountable dominance and the increasing demand for ideologically-sound content drenched in equally vigorous antisemitism and nationalism¹⁰⁹. Yet as the 1930s progressed, decision-makers in the German film industry found their very nemesis, Hollywood, as the best inspiration to reinvent their craft and storytelling left despondent by the “massive talent drain after the coordination of the industry”¹¹⁰.

Seen from Hollywood, Germany’s forceful and adamant campaign to “sabotage a thriving industry in the midst of a worldwide economic meltdown” by eliminating all Jews, was as confusing to studio heads as it was to specialized journalists¹¹¹. Despite some voices claiming that “Berlin’s loss would be Hollywood’s gain,” Doherty surmised that the prevalent feeling was one of bewilderment instead of unscrupulousness¹¹². While Hollywood studio executives and senior staff were already struggling to satisfy countless national censorship bureaus in their effort for worldwide distribution, their work to have their pictures accepted in Nazi Germany was threefold¹¹³. They had to consider the specific foreign movie quota, a surviving rule from the previous regime, then they had to secure a Reich Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda certificate, and finally go through a “home censor” who reviewed the term in terms of “moral, political, and eugenic purity.” According to Hake, this model consisted of a 20 percent propaganda to 80 percent entertainment ratio¹¹⁴, aiming to make Nazi cinema acceptable to a public developed in the Weimar Republic. Its

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰⁸ Hake, *Popular Cinema*, 29.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 14-15.

¹¹⁰ Hake, *Popular Cinema*, 134.

¹¹¹ Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*, 24.

¹¹² Ibid., 24.

¹¹³ Ibid., 24-25.

¹¹⁴ Hake, *Popular Cinema*, 4.

style relied heavily on classical storyline tropes, negotiating the relationship between free-market capitalism and right-wing totalitarianism¹¹⁵. The only way a movie could still be allowed in theaters if it failed any of the three requirements was by going through a thorough Nazi re-editing process¹¹⁶. As Doherty observed, Nazi censorship resembled its Anglo-Saxon equivalent in many ways, particularly regarding morality. However, it never wavered when refusing any positive depiction of Jewish characters or stories¹¹⁷. Jungle settings were ranked alongside jazz and any positive or harmonious image with or including non-white, especially black artists. An unlikely Romanian-related example was Banat-born Johnny Weissmuller when his celebrated 1932 movie *Tarzan the Ape Man* was declared dangerous to Nazi ideology¹¹⁸. American producers also managed to evade censorship by emphasizing famous designer *haute couture* models. An example would be hiding risqué images and subjects behind the allure of the latest Chanel models in 1932, for a movie that had already changed its title from *The Greeks Had a Word for It* to an “even more benign” *Three Broadway Girls* on similar concerns¹¹⁹.

The return-to-Classical-femininity rhetoric endowed anti-feminist rhetoric from conservatives to extreme-right wing militant groups profited from the Great Depression-driven growing tensions described by Sarah Berry around “women’s social mobility and status”¹²⁰. In a Romanian context this blended Orthodox morality principles with a Romanian translation of Nazi nationalist Germanness discourse. An extreme example in a Legionnaire propaganda context would be Radu Gyr’s late 1930s texts on women’s spiritual, moral, and national heroism¹²¹. But these standards did not fully translate to Bucharest’s reality. As Damian recounted, mid-1930s Bucharesters, cinemas had already replaced cafés as the typical romantic encounter

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹¹⁶ Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*, 25.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 26.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹¹⁹ Finamore, *Hollywood Before Glamour*, 177.

¹²⁰ Berry, *Screen Style*, xviii

¹²¹ Gyr, *Femeia în eroismul spiritual, moral și național*.

places, where lovers “eat American nuts and caramels”¹²², illustrated by vivid scenes presented by Damian of various types of couples¹²³, with less concern over maintaining an elegant behavior, the farther away from the center¹²⁴. Overall, the cinema was an integral part of a Bucharest nighttime outing, with the crowds “commenting or swearing, if the movie was bad” on their way to their clubs of choice. Even more, Damian’s account concluded with a mention of “a few fellows” who are inevitably at any cinema door ready to make advances to any woman who appeared unaccompanied while exiting the venue¹²⁵. These stories highlight the discrepancy between the official understanding of cinema as a propaganda tool and the real-life experience in cinemas across Bucharest.

On a larger scale, while Dietrich was German by birth, she was added alongside Chaplin on the Nazi instant ban list. Dietrich’s Aryan physical qualities and the fact that she was “the most famous German actress on the planet” did not save her from the rage of Nazi film critics who denounced her betrayal when “cavorting in the enemy camp.” Dietrich retaliated by ignoring Berlin during a three-month tour of Europe and adding a declaration that she would likely never work in Germany again¹²⁶. In the meantime, Hollywood studios with Berlin offices, even if set up during the Weimar era, were forced to undergo thorough scrutiny from the German authorities on personnel and production issues¹²⁷. This added to desperate efforts by studios like MGM to relocate their Jewish employees from Germany and replace them with individuals deemed “desirable” in Nazi eyes¹²⁸. By the end of the decade, two months before the start of World War 2, Dietrich officially and happily announced she was a US citizen, although her application was submitted in 1933¹²⁹, unlike her more recently

¹²² Damian, *Bucureşti*, 93.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 94-96.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹²⁶ Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*, 27.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 204-5.

naturalized compatriots who wasted no time to obtain and publicly display their new US citizenships¹³⁰.

Just as the expected gain of talent and skill owing to the post-1933 creative exodus, Nazi Germany could also be viewed as an indirect benefactor to the proliferation of American, mainly Hollywood-driven fashion, as World War 2 and the subsequent occupation of France cut all ties to Paris, and with that hindered its effort to maintain dominance over worldwide style¹³¹. This meant non-Parisian fashion creation could flourish without the fear of retaliation by rejection by the “jealous monarch” of style¹³². Los Angeles, and California in general, was in the process of also overtaking major American fashion industrial centers, including New York and Chicago¹³³. As Sheryl Farnan explained, California’s fashion culture was informed by the “clean, modern design coming from the neighbouring movie industry,” which granted it a certain immunity after the Parisian occupation¹³⁴. Even more, Farnan asserted California had been ahead in the competition against New York fashion culture and education due to Hollywood and its related fields of dissemination, including photography and written media¹³⁵. Hollywood had already proven itself to be unexpectedly resilient after the Great Depression, when, to the dismay of its critics, it managed to swiftly – and arguably glamorously – reinvent itself from its core to adapt to the new world driven by financial distress, fervent ideological undertones, and talking pictures¹³⁶. Even if silent films and their universality in non-verbal storytelling had benefitted interrelations between the German and Hollywood cinema industries¹³⁷. By the end of the interwar era, Hollywood continued its path for world cultural and popular dominance,

¹³⁰ Ibid., 205.

¹³¹ Sheryl A. Farnan, “California Way of Life: Promotion of California Sportswear, 1930–47,” *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 81–82, https://doi.org/10.1386/fspc.5.1.81_1.

¹³² Godart, “The Power Structure of the Fashion Industry,” 41.

¹³³ Farnan, “California Way of Life,” 82.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 85.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ David Karnes, “The Glamorous Crowd: Hollywood Movie Premieres Between the Wars,” *American Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1986): 563, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2712694>.

¹³⁷ Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*, 13.

while German cinema was becoming increasingly marginal¹³⁸. Romania's non-existing national film industry, with a few exceptions, did not deter the cinema-loving public to consume as much as regular Germans or Americans.

Romanian Cinematic Art as Propaganda: A Partial Fulfilment

As seen with Goebbels crystallizing notions of art, and by extension, cinema, as prevalent tools in winning both the minds and hearts of target populations. This is a lesson that has not appeared to reach the increasingly-extremist right-wing Romanian authorities who only took the idea of building censorship and propaganda bureaus before there was even a suggestion of a cinema industry in the country¹³⁹. The timidly-growing Romanian cinema industry had been reflecting what had occurred in the field abroad, while also acknowledging the theatrical stage as a multifaceted source of talent. By 1919, major theatre actors accepted movie parts. The industry did not flourish, despite the creation of a National Cinematographic Fund in 1934 to establish the Bucharest Studio¹⁴⁰. Jean Mihail was a Romanian cinema pioneer as both a film director and writer. He worked with both large and artisanal studios, for both melodrama and documentary films¹⁴¹. He also offered a personal yet historically relevant account of the early years of Romanian cinema. According to him, despite authorities not considering its development a high priority, Romanians were keenly interested in film. It was in close synchronization with foreign productions, which would enter local cinemas within months and even in a shorter timeframe. While Mihail admitted the advent of the talkies stopped Romanian film production in the 1930s¹⁴², the latter part of the decade saw the development of German-style official propaganda efforts, culminating with a new

¹³⁸ Hake, *Popular Cinema*, 138.

¹³⁹ Jean Mihail, *Filmul românesc de altădată* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1967), 196-197.

¹⁴⁰ Gheorghe Parusi, *Cronologia Bucureştilor: 20 septembrie 1459-31 decembrie 1989: Zilele, faptele, oamenii Capitalei de-a lungul a 530 de ani* (Bucharest: Compania, 2007), 567.

¹⁴¹ Cristina Corciovescu and Bujor T. Rîpeanu, *1234 cineşti români: ghid bio-filmografic* (Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1996), 220.

¹⁴² Mihail, *Filmul românesc*, 150.

Ministry of Propaganda since 1938, which included national offices for cinema and tourism. Romanian film became state cinema, but it took the form of news or documentary bulletins and ignored everything about art. Yet at that time propaganda cinema was still at an incipient stage, which would eventually develop towards the Army's Staff "propaganda platoons" producing bulletins to galvanize the population to accept Romania's 1941 warpath¹⁴³. This was accompanied by the efforts to produce and popularize a series of documentary films on Romanian bucolic themes in the late-1930s led by notable sociologists like Dimitrie Gusti and Henri Stahl¹⁴⁴.

But there were also direct connections to Berlin. As Mihail recounted, interwar Romanian filmmakers routinely learned and even practiced their craft in the Weimar Republic, but at their own cost as there was virtually no State support¹⁴⁵. But the results did not reach the intended stellar success even when the Romanian authorities decided to invest in cinema. An important State-backed 1930 cinematic production specifically intended for national propaganda, *Ciuleandra*, inspired by Romanian writer Liviu Rebreanu's homonymous novel. It was directed by the German Martin Berger with little regard for linguistic or source-material authenticity¹⁴⁶. This generated a furiously negative response from the Romanian public on both story quality and national pride grounds, which the authorities ignored as they continued with the movie's heavy promotion campaign¹⁴⁷. Documentaries also provide Romanian-German links. The 1936 *România* documentary, a Romanian National Tourism Office and Berlin's *Tobis-Melo-Film* co-production, aiming to "open Europe's eyes about the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space," was applauded at the Paris Industrial Exhibition with an award for its "sweet pastoral beauty" enveloping a bucolic Grigorescian community, alongside rare but important cultural or industrial locations¹⁴⁸.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 291.

¹⁴⁴ Călin Căliman, *Istoria filmului românesc: 1897-2017*, 3rd ed., Dicționare & enciclopedii (Bucharest: Contemporanul, 2017), 100.

¹⁴⁵ Mihail, *Filmul românesc*, 29.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 154.

¹⁴⁷ Căliman, *Istoria filmului românesc*, 124.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 102.

Romanian national propaganda in the 1930s, especially after Carol II returned from exile as an increasingly autocratic and right-wing-friendly monarch, mimicked Germany's politics of Aryanization into one of Romanianization. While Doherty's description of the mythological Aryan as a "crackpot racial category"¹⁴⁹ lends some fundamental meanings to the so-called "new Romanian" within a purported "Romanian race," its markers shift towards localized categories drawn from narrow, ultra-masculine, and extreme-conservative interpretations of the historical and religious mythos. Even if scientific and especially eugenic theoretical language was reaching a peak of crystallization during the interwar era, collective and personality identity discourse from ideas of nation to cosmetics and fashion, continued to rely on abstract concepts like beauty and heroism. Conflating morality with hygiene, Romanian censors also tackled the romantic aspects of Hollywood movies justified by foreign professional accounts. In early 1930, the nationally-distributed weekly glossy illustrated magazine *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată* published an anonymous article inquiring whether the so-called "final kiss" in movies was a real danger. According to the article's introduction, it was about time that Europeans began tackling this issue, after the "sensational campaign" in the US against movie kisses, a topic covered by the author previously, in detail. The author claimed several "medicine professors from Berlin and Paris" began an anti-kiss campaign informed by "probably by the advertisement – empty advertisement, as, fundamentally, the facts are the same – with which the Yankees assert their puritanism." Even more, these professors aim to forbid any mundane and artistic "manifestation of love left from our forefathers." The underlying motivation, as explained in the article, was hygienic, as "the transmission of germs, means our demise." This prompted the anonymous author to ask Maurice Dekobra, Clement Vautel, Jean Angelo, Germaine Dulac, and Marcel l'Herbier for their perspective on the issue¹⁵⁰. On a more literal note, the Romanian *Cinema* magazine published an article about Polish actress Pola Negri, at the time among the most successful film actresses active in Berlin, claiming that she had close ties with Hitler and may have been interned in Dachau

¹⁴⁹ Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler*, 21.

¹⁵⁰ "Este sau nu, 'sărutul final' un pericol?," *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, February 1, (1930):13

after her rivals conspired against her¹⁵¹. This article was a word-to-word translation from a homonymous French article by a not-so-French-sounding S.-F. Feinck, in the French cinema weekly *Pour Vous* within a section titled *Les mystères féminines du IIIe Reich*, occupying half of the page, while the other half announced Lyda Baardova as the Fuhrer's new favorite.¹⁵² The Romanian article did not add the article's author, nor did it mention that the copyright belonged to *Presse-Actualités* and *Pour Vous*, as mentioned underneath, in English. After the news quickly spread worldwide, Negri sued *Pour Vous* for libel on this article and won 10,000 francs compensation for all damages, but her career never recovered from the rumor of her being Hitler's mistress¹⁵³.

Romanian fashion reports were keen to announce in 1933 how the German *Gretchen* image was on the verge of replacing the 'Garbo type'¹⁵⁴. Cinema and fashion history, however, have shown that not only did Hollywood fashion survive the 1930s, but Garbo has remained to this day essential to any discussion of cinema style. The *Gretchen* image or, in Romania's case a possible *Ciuleandra* type could not eclipse cinema fashion, despite the vigorous and in many cases irregular effort from extreme-right-wing authorities¹⁵⁵. This was not accidental, however. Fashion, like propaganda, can be described as a form of communication, akin to language¹⁵⁶. The essence of propaganda is exploiting ambivalence in meaning or usage to effectively influence larger populations at an emotional and cognitive level. This can be achieved textually, by likely deliberately using the words "nation" and "race"

¹⁵¹ Anonymous, "Pola Negri - internată la Dachau?" *Cinema*, November 19, (1938):3.

¹⁵² S.-F. Feinck, "Pola Negri - est-elle internée à Dachau?" *Pour vous*, November 2, (1938):3.

¹⁵³ Mariusz Kotowski, *Pola Negri: Hollywood's First Femme Fatale* (Lexington KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 182.

¹⁵⁴ Rodia, "Allo! Allo! Aci Parisul," *Ilustrațiunea Română*, September 13, (1933): 16.

¹⁵⁵ Andraș, *Morbul Garbitei*, 367-368.

¹⁵⁶ See Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, ed. Andy Stafford and Michael Carter, trans. Andy Stafford (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006); Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 1992); Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008).

interchangeably as in the Romanian case, or visually by modifying or changing the orientation of a known visual symbol, as the Nazis did with the Swastika¹⁵⁷, as a redrawn and flipped ancient cross-cultural divine and auspicious emblem. Beyond the increasingly recognized power of symbolism as propaganda¹⁵⁸, as meanings shift through a dynamic process of transculturation¹⁵⁹, changes at a vernacular level are more difficult to trace without a thorough understanding of all languages and cultures involved. Geczy asserted collective identity discourse, especially in connection to nationalism, remains a “highly linguistic affair” of differentiation between what is and what is not included in a specific category¹⁶⁰. It is then safe to assume that this policy of exclusion on a binary insider-outside expression uses this inherent understanding of untranslatability as a key player in constructing a sense of superiority for those who know and understand the jargon. Yet Hollywood types continued to remain important identity markers for Bucharesters of both sexes. An example would be a “likeness contest” organized by the illustrated weekly *Realitatea Ilustrată* in collaboration with Metro-Goldwin-Mayer. The event’s announcement promised no gender, “social rank” or age criteria beside the likeness to Hollywood movie stars, including those presented with the ad, namely John Barrymore, Wallace Beery, Lyonel Barrymore, Greta Garbo, and Joan Crawford¹⁶¹.

As a globalization-based phenomenon, modernity links to national identity as it allows nations and cultures to determine their ancestry and use preferred histories and allegiances to set future paths¹⁶².

¹⁵⁷ See Nicholas Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *Politics and Propaganda: Weapons of Mass Seduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 107; Bernard Mees, *The Science of the Swastika* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2008), 11-12; Joanne Mundorf and Guo-Ming Chen, “Transculturation of Visual Signs: A Case Analysis of the Swastika,” *Intercultural Communication Studies* 15, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 34-36.

¹⁵⁸ O’Shaughnessy, *Politics and Propaganda*, 1.

¹⁵⁹ Mundorf and Chen, “Transculturation of Visual Signs,” 33.

¹⁶⁰ Geczy, *Transorientalism*, 37.

¹⁶¹ Anonymous, “Concursul de asemănare – Realitatea Ilustrată – Metro-Goldwin,” *Realitatea Ilustrată*, December 1, (1932):4-5.

¹⁶² Ivaylo Dichev, “The Eros of Identity,” in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2002), 242.

This popular modernity practice of identity-based generalizations tended to erase differences and create a capitalist, seemingly cosmopolitan society where variations poured from the margins towards the center, perpetually negotiating hybrid identity markers¹⁶³. Cosmopolitanism denotes human inventiveness as emotionally charged socio-political interactions, but with state-dependent prosperity¹⁶⁴. While “nationhood – or nation-ness” functions as cultural and political currency, its definitions are inherently volatile and context-based, demonstrating modernity’s “terrible asymmetries”¹⁶⁵. This applied to Romania’s irregular translation of Hollywood and Nazi identity models, as well as local and regional reference markers.

From Little Paris to the City of Angels and Back

Although interwar Bucharest itself did not generate what Pamela Church-Gibson called movie screen “fashion moments”¹⁶⁶, Romanian beauty and fashion icons had been present onscreen in Romania, but especially abroad. Recognizable interwar Romanian female artists in Romanian movie productions included Sevastia Popescu, Mia Teodorescu, Lily Flohr, Elvira Godeanu, Marieta Sadoveanu, Camelia Mihail, and renowned Romanian ballerina Elena Prodanovici-Bulandra. Among the Romanian actresses who found fame abroad were Maria Ventura, Emmy Lynn, Brândușa Grozăvescu, Jenny Holt, Elizza La Porta, or Lisete Vereă¹⁶⁷. Some of these artists were career actresses who transitioned from the stage to the screen, and others like Paula Iliescu, re-fashioned as Pola Illéry, launched their cinema stardom through beauty

¹⁶³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

¹⁶⁴ Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, Eleonore Kofman, and Catherine Kevin, eds., *Branding Cities: Cosmopolitanism, Parochialism, and Social Change* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 3.

¹⁶⁵ Sheldon Pollock et al., “Cosmopolitanisms,” *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (October 1, 2000): 582, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-12-3-577>.

¹⁶⁶ Pamela Church Gibson, “New Stars, New Fashion and the Female Audience: Cinema, Consumption and Cities 1953-1966,” in *Fashion’s World Cities*, ed. Christopher Breward and David Gilbert, *Cultures of Consumption* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), 90.

¹⁶⁷ Mihail, *Filmul românesc*, 162-163.

contests¹⁶⁸. Elvira Popesco eventually moved to Paris and built a prominent stage and film career as Elvire Popesco¹⁶⁹. Alice Cocea or rewritten Cocéa led a tumultuous career both in Paris and in Hollywood¹⁷⁰. Literal or figurative Garbo impersonations played upon what Berry described as a “playful and pleasure-oriented mode of self-conscious role-playing” applicable to Hollywood star models of Garbo’s status¹⁷¹. In Romania’s case, celebrated theatre actress, Maria Mohor was credited as “Romania’s Greta Garbo” in her attempt to delve into cinema in 1930¹⁷². Just like any interwar cinema-consuming society, Romania was enamored with Garbo. Her name was synonymous with glamour and success and women dreamed that if they could not become like her, they could at least strive to look as similar to her portraits in magazines or her movements on the screen¹⁷³. Her fame even reached the Romanian intellectual sphere. As Cristina Bejan noted, Garbo was the only woman¹⁷⁴ in a list of distinctly non-Romanian, multidisciplinary ‘Idols’ across the cultural and political spectrum, selected by the Criterion Association, a predominantly-male literary society bound by personal friendship and similar social, philosophical, and political ideals¹⁷⁵. In a series of sessions, the Criterionists added the Swedish Sphinx to a list containing Vladimir Lenin, Sigmund Freud, Charlie Chaplin, Benito

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 162; H. Doru, “O româncă pe firmamentul ecranului,” *Realitatea Ilustrată*, February 13, (1930):4.

¹⁶⁹ See Ion Manea, ed., “Popescu, Elvira,” in *Enciclopedia Români În Știința Și Cultura Occidentală*, Academia Româno-Americană de Științe Și Arte (Davis CA: ARA Publications, 1992), 294-297.

¹⁷⁰ See Gérard Damion, *Alice Cocea (1899-1970) de la gloire à l’oubli* (Sinaia and Saint-Brisson: Edition999, 2021), <https://www.edition999.info/Alice-Cocea-1899-1970-de-la-gloire.html#>.

¹⁷¹ Berry, *Screen Style*, 29.

¹⁷² N. Munteanu, “De vorbă cu Greta Garbo a României,” *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, July 24, 1930, 13-14.

¹⁷³ See Andraş, *Morbul Garbitei*, for a detailed account of the Garbo myth in interwar Romania.

¹⁷⁴ Cristina A Bejan, *Intellectuals and Fascism in Interwar Romania. The Criterion Association* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20165-4>, 122-123.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 193.

Mussolini, Paul Valéry, Henri Bergson, Marcel Proust, Mahatma Gandhi or Pablo Picasso¹⁷⁶.

The Hollywood dream proved to be illusory for most young Romanian aspirants. In April 1931, general-topic and nationally-distributed illustrated weekly *Ilustrațiunea Română* announced the birth of a new movie star discovered by Charlie Chaplin. The sensational discovery the article announced was even more relevant by her Romanian origin. According to the article, while walking through a “great hotel” lobby in Berlin, Chaplin was immediately drawn by a young woman sitting on a chair. He approached her and immediately told her that she must start a cinema career, which she rebuffed by stating she was a student. When asked how old she was, she replied she was an 18-year-old Bucharester named Florentina Constantinescu. He immediately promised to make her a star, and he quickly managed to convince her to leave the Faculty of Law and go to Paris for an audition with Chaplin himself, which she aced. She was to go to Hollywood, but not before taking one last exam¹⁷⁷. Even though there are no records of a successful actress by that name in 1930s Hollywood, there were several Romanian movie stars of international repute. There is also a high chance article was only an anecdote with little or no relation to actual events, published to convince the magazine’s readers the ‘Hollywood dream’ was an attainable goal. The magazine did not follow up on the story, which would suggest Constantinescu’s path to stardom may have been curtailed before it even started.

While cinema was a popular pastime in interwar Romania, the lack of a proper Romanian cinema industry forced creators to seek outside assistance. Throughout the 1930s, Romanian film producers followed the coproduction model, most visibly seen in the Romanian version of the thirteen-language *Paramount Parade* or its same-studio successor, *Televiziune (Television)*, both featuring Pola Illéry¹⁷⁸. The Romanian cinema industry was open to all dramatic career levels. Save for international personalities like Popesco or Illéry, interwar Romania did not cultivate movie stars. Most silver-screen actors were prominent

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 93.

¹⁷⁷ Anonymous, “O senzațională descoperire a lui Charlie Chaplin (Noua stea este o româncă),” *Ilustrațiunea Română*, April 9, (1931):14.

¹⁷⁸ Mihail, *Filmul românesc*, 163-164.

theatre figures, whose fame added prestige. A relevant example is theatre and film actress Elvira Godeanu. In his short tenure as Bucharest National Theatre manager, Liviu Rebreanu hired her in 1929. While she maintained her main career on-stage as a lead National Theatre actress, she headlined in several productions, including *Ciuleandra*¹⁷⁹.

At ground level, the reality was most middle-class fashion-consuming Bucharesters could only look at Hollywood from afar, through the silver screen or by reading specialized or general-topic illustrated publications. Beyond keeping abreast with the latest news about Cary Grant, Greta Garbo, or Charlie Chaplin, they could also find Hollywood stars in fashion articles. Without completely foregoing the calls for 'Parisian elegance,' style reports in the 1930s began using movie stills and professional movie star photographs to illustrate certain outfits or styles. For instance, right at the dawn of the decade, *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată* published an entire-page article dedicated to the idea of "copying the fashions of the stars," in this case Marion Davies, Catherine Dale Qwen, or the "young Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer star" Kay Johnson. The article evocatively described the impression of the outfit as seen in the image, with a mention of Hollywood female stars being "invited to lend their gracious silhouettes, to the creations of great couturiers," who remain, however unnamed, like the article's own anonymous author¹⁸⁰.

Conclusion: Fashioning a Hollywood-Berlin-Bucharest Itinerary

Fashion and cinema function within a hybrid material and symbolic realm as progenies of modernity with intricate and oftentimes indistinguishable connections to modernism. Both engaged with similar methods and intentions with the idea of 'glamour,' understood since the age of Classical Hollywood as allure combining fashionability and a mesmerizing attitude. When considering the magical implications of 'glamour' as a type of sorcery for coercion, then the notion can be associated with the idea of 'propaganda.' Both involve techniques of swaying minds and hearts toward an intended conclusion and suggest subsequent actions. Cinema culture advanced the idea that 'glamour' was

¹⁷⁹ Corciovescu Rîpeanu, *1234 cineşti români*, 155.

¹⁸⁰ Anonymous, "Să copiem moda stelelor," *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, March 1, (1930):10.

not only a woman's right, but it was also her power, in a new era. Propaganda, on the other hand, was at the hand of the State in a wide variety of contexts on an ideological and leadership-type level. Therefore, if one would build a glamour-propaganda spectrum, the parameters would be between progressive and repressive. In this context, the complicated negotiations in terms of cinema and style between Hollywood and Berlin are reflected and translated into Romanian, adding local flavors to the interactions. Even if Bucharest is not automatically associated with Classical Cinema or interwar high fashion, its own-in-betweenness as a space accommodating both Western and Eastern traits and with its political and cultural allegiance in the interwar era can offer valuable clues about the general underlying phenomena of the era. Bucharest is thus a valid example of a borderspace and the location where glamour and propaganda run concomitantly and, in many cases, indistinctly.